

## Head of CENTCOM joins talks with Iran

*Associated Press*

MUSCAT, Oman — Iran and the United States held indirect talks in Oman on Friday, negotiations that appeared to return to the starting point on how to approach discussions over Tehran's nuclear program. But for the first time, America brought its top military commander in the Middle East to the table.

The presence of Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of U.S. Central Command, in his dress uniform at the talks in Muscat, served as a reminder that the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and other warships were now off the coast of Iran in the Arabian Sea.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to use force to compel Iran to reach a deal on the program after earlier sending the carrier to the region over Tehran's bloody crackdown on protests that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands of others detained in the Islamic Republic.

Gulf Arab nations fear an at-

tack could spark a regional war that would drag them in as well.

That threat is real — U.S. forces shot down an Iranian drone near the Lincoln and Iran attempted to stop a U.S.-flagged ship in the Strait of Hormuz just days before Friday's talks in this sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula.

"We did note that nuclear talks and the resolution of the main issues must take place in a calm atmosphere, without tension and without threats," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi later told journalists.

"The prerequisite for any dialogue is refraining from threats and pressure," he added. "We stated this point explicitly today as well, and we expect it to be observed so that the possibility of continuing the talks exists."

The U.S., represented by Mideast special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, did not immediately comment on the talks. Araghchi said diplomats

would return to their capitals, signaling this round of negotiations was over.

Araghchi offered cautious optimism as he spoke in a live interview from Muscat on Iranian state television. He described Friday's talks as taking place over multiple rounds and said that they were focused primarily on finding a framework for further negotiations.

"We will hold consultations with our capitals regarding the next steps, and the results will be conveyed to Oman's foreign minister," Araghchi said.

"The mistrust that has developed is a serious challenge facing the negotiations," Araghchi said. "We must first address this issue, and then enter into the next level of negotiations."

Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, who oversaw multiple rounds of negotiations before Israel launched its 12-day war on Iran in June, called the talks "useful to clarify both the Iranian and American thinking

and identify areas for possible progress."

Still, Oman described the talks as a means to find "the requisite foundations for the resumption of both diplomatic and technical negotiations" rather than a step toward reaching a nuclear deal or easing tensions.

The had initially been expected to take place in Turkey in a format that would have included regional countries as well, and would have included topics like Tehran's ballistic missile program — something Iran apparently rejected in favor of focusing only on its nuclear program.

Before the June war, Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels. The U.N. nuclear watchdog — International Atomic Energy Agency — had said Iran was the only country in the world to enrich to that level that wasn't armed with the bomb.

## Kremlin: Russia, US agree quick arms talks needed

*Associated Press*

MOSCOW — Russian and U.S. negotiators discussed the expiration of the last remaining nuclear arms pact between the two countries and agreed on the need to quickly launch new arms control talks, the Kremlin said Friday, even as the U.S. emphasized the need for China to join an arms pact and accused Beijing of covert nuclear tests.

The New START treaty terminated Thursday, leaving no caps on the two largest atomic arsenals for the first time in more than a half-century and fueling fears of an uncon-

strained nuclear arms race.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has declared his readiness to stick to the treaty's limits for another year if Washington followed suit. U.S. President Donald Trump has ignored the offer and argued he wants China to be a part of a new treaty, which Beijing has rebuffed.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio reiterated that China should be involved in a potential new nuclear treaty. "An arms control arrangement that does not account for China's buildup, which Russia is supporting, will undoubtedly leave the United

States and our allies less safe," he said. Another U.S. diplomat accused Beijing of secretly conducting nuclear tests.

Russian and U.S. negotiators discussed the future of nuclear arms control in the United Arab Emirates, where Russian, Ukrainian and U.S. delegations held two days of talks on a peace settlement in Ukraine, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Friday.

"There is an understanding, and they talked about it in Abu Dhabi, that both parties will take responsible positions and both parties realize the need to

start talks on the issue as soon as possible," Peskov said.

Asked to comment on a report by Axios claiming Russian and U.S. negotiators discussed a possible informal deal to observe the pact's limits for at least six months, Peskov responded that any such extension could only be formal.

Even as New START expired, the U.S. and Russia agreed Thursday to reestablish high-level, military-to-military dialogue following a meeting between senior officials from both sides in Abu Dhabi, the U.S. military command in Europe said.

# US strikes another suspected drug-trafficking boat in Pacific

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military said Thursday that it has carried out another deadly strike on a vessel accused of trafficking drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

U.S. Southern Command said on social media that the boat “was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations.” It said the strike killed two people. A video linked to the post shows a boat moving through the water before exploding in flames.

The strike was announced just hours after Defense Secre-

tary Pete Hegseth declared that “some top cartel drug-traffickers” in the region “have decided to cease all narcotics operations INDEFINITELY due to recent (highly effective) kinetic strikes in the Caribbean.”

However, Hegseth did not provide any details or information to back up this claim, made in a post on his personal account on social media.

The boat attacks, which began in September 2025, have slowed in frequency since January — a month that only saw one strike after the raid that captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. By contrast, the Pentagon struck more

than dozen boats in December 2025.

Thursday’s attack raises the death toll from the Trump administration’s strikes on alleged drug boats to 128 people.

Last week, the military said that figure was up to 126 people, with the inclusion of those presumed dead after being lost at sea. That figure included 116 people who were killed immediately in at least 36 attacks carried out since early September in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean, U.S. Southern Command said.

Ten others are believed dead because searchers did not locate them following a strike.

## Iran seizes 2 foreign oil tankers in Persian Gulf

MUSCAT, Oman — Iran seized two foreign oil tankers in the Persian Gulf on Thursday, state television reported, claiming the vessels had been smuggling fuel.

The report did not provide a nationality of the tankers or say what flag they were flying under.

Gen. Heidar Honarian Mojarrad, a regional commander with the Revolutionary Guard’s navy, said the tankers had been carrying about 6,300 barrels, including diesel and were seized near Farsi island and transferred to Bushehr.

Fifteen crew members on board the two tankers are “in custody of judicial bodies,” he said, without providing their nationalities.

Iran occasionally seizes oil-carrying vessels over similar charges in the region.

In December, it seized a foreign tanker as it traveled the strategic Strait of Hormuz, detaining 16 crew. It had also seized a ship in the Strait of Hormuz in November.

The West has blamed Iran for a series of limpet mine attacks on vessels that damaged tankers in 2019, as well as for a drone attack on an Israeli-linked oil tanker that killed two European crew members in 2021. Those attacks began after U.S. President Donald Trump, in his first term in office, unilaterally withdrew from Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

The seizure came the day before the U.S. and Iran were expected to meet for nuclear talks in Omani. Tensions between the countries remain high following Tehran’s bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month.

## Canada, France opening consulates in Greenland following tensions with US

Associated Press

NUUK, Greenland — Canada and France planned to open diplomatic consulates Friday in the capital of Greenland, showing support for NATO ally Denmark and the Arctic island in the wake of U.S. efforts to secure control of the semiautonomous Danish territory.

Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand was traveling to Nuuk to inaugurate the consulate that officials say also could help boost cooperation on issues like climate change and Inuit rights. She was being joined by Canada’s Indigenous governor general, Mary Simon.

France’s Foreign Ministry said Jean-Noël Poirier also would take up his duties as consul general, making it the first European Union country to establish a consulate general in Greenland.

Poirier will be “tasked with working to deepen existing cooperation projects with Greenland in the cultural, scientific, and economic fields, while also strengthening political ties with the local authorities,” the ministry said.

Canada pledged to open a consulate in Greenland in 2024, before Trump’s talk of a takeover, and the formal inauguration was delayed from November because of bad weather.

Anand met Danish counterpart Lars Løkke Rasmussen in Denmark on Thursday and posted on social media that “as Arctic nations, Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark are working together to strengthen stability, security, and cooperation across the region.”

France says the decision to open its diplomatic outpost was taken when President Emma-

uel Macron visited in June.

President Donald Trump announced in January he would slap new tariffs on Denmark and seven other European countries that opposed his takeover calls, only to abruptly drop his threats after he said a “framework” for a deal over access to mineral-rich Greenland was reached with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte’s help. Few details of that agreement have emerged.

Last week, technical talks started between the U.S., Denmark and Greenland to put together an Arctic security deal. The foreign ministers of Denmark and Greenland had agreed to create a working group during a meeting with U.S. Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio before Trump made his tariff threats.

# Homeland Security shutdown more likely

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Majority Leader John Thune said Thursday that demands made by Democrats for new restrictions on federal immigration officers are “unrealistic” and warned that the Department of Homeland Security will shut down next week if they do not work with Republicans and the White House.

Democrats say they will not vote for a DHS spending bill when funding runs out unless there are “dramatic changes” at Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other federal law enforcement agencies in the wake of the fatal shootings of two protesters in Minneapolis last month.

The Democratic leaders, Sen. Chuck Schumer and Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, released an expanded list of 10 detailed proposals on Wednesday night for restraining President Donald

Trump’s aggressive campaign of immigration enforcement. Among the demands are a requirement for judicial warrants, better identification of DHS officers, new use of force standards and a stop to racial profiling.

Congress is trying to renegotiate the DHS spending bill after Trump last week agreed to a Democratic request that it be separated from a larger spending measure and extended at current levels for two weeks while the two parties negotiate. The deal came after hospital intensive care unit nurse Alex Pretti was shot and killed by a U.S. Border Patrol officer in Minneapolis on Jan. 24, and some Republicans agreed that new restrictions were necessary.

But with nearly a week gone, a shutdown is becoming increasingly likely starting Feb. 14 as Republicans have been

cool to most of the Democrats’ requests.

“This is not a blank check situation where Republicans just do agree to a list of Democrat demands,” said Thune, R-S.D. “The only way to get reforms to ICE is to agree to a bill.”

As of now, Thune said, “we aren’t anywhere close to having any sort of an agreement.”

In addition to ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the homeland security bill includes funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Transportation Security Administration. If DHS shuts down, Thune said, “there’s a very good chance we could see more travel problems” similar to those during the 43-day government closure last year.

Schumer, D-N.Y., said he is “astounded to hear” Republicans say his party’s proposals were political or unworkable.

“It’s about people’s basic rights; it’s about people’s safety,” he said. If Republicans do not like the ideas, he said, “they need to explain why.”

Schumer and Jeffries, D-N.Y., have made several demands, including no masks for officers, judicial warrants and better federal coordination with local authorities.

The list they released Wednesday added several new items, including a stricter use-of-force policy, legal safeguards at detention centers and a prohibition on tracking protesters with body-worn cameras.

Democrats say Congress should end indiscriminate arrests, “improve warrant procedures and standards,” ensure the law is clear that officers cannot enter private property without a judicial warrant and require that before a person can be detained, it’s verified that the person is not a U.S. citizen.

## Feds: Man threatened, cyberstalked ICE officers

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — A Minneapolis man was arrested Thursday on charges of cyberstalking and threatening to kill or assault Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers involved in the crackdown in Minnesota.

Federal prosecutors said in a statement that Kyle Wagner, 37, of Minneapolis, was charged by complaint, and that a decision to seek an indictment, which is necessary to take the case to trial, would be made soon.

Court records in Detroit, where the case was filed, did not list an attorney who could speak on Wagner’s behalf. The complaint was filed on Tuesday and unsealed Thursday.

Attorney General Pamela Bondi alleged in a statement that Wagner doxed and threat-

ened law enforcement officers, claimed an affiliation with antifa and “encouraged bloodshed in the streets.”

President Donald Trump announced in September that he would designate antifa a “major terrorist organization.” Antifa, short for “anti-fascists,” is an umbrella term for far-left-leaning militant groups and is not a singular entity. It consists of groups that resist fascists and neo-Nazis, especially at demonstrations.

When Trump administration border czar Tom Homan announced Wednesday that about 700 federal officers deployed to Minnesota would be withdrawn immediately, he said a larger pullout would occur only after there’s more cooperation and protesters stop interfering with federal personnel.

## TrumpRx site launched for discounted drugs

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Trump administration on Thursday launched TrumpRx, a website it says will help patients buy prescription drugs directly at a discounted rate at a time when health care and the cost of living are growing concerns for Americans.

“You’re going to save a fortune,” President Donald Trump said at the site’s unveiling. “And this is also so good for overall health care.”

The government-hosted website is not a platform for buying medications. Instead, it’s set up as a facilitator, pointing Americans to drugmakers’ direct-to-consumer websites, where they can make purchases. It also provides coupons to use at pharmacies. The site launches with over 40 medications, including

weight loss drugs such as Ozempic and Wegovy.

The site is part of a larger effort by the Trump administration to show it’s tackling the challenges of high costs.

Affordability has emerged as a political vulnerability for Trump and his Republican allies going into November’s mid-term elections, as Americans remain worried about the cost of housing, groceries, utilities and other staples of middle-class identity.

Trump stressed that the lower prices were made possible by his pressuring of pharmaceutical companies on prices, saying he demanded that they charge the same costs in the U.S. as in other nations.

He said prescription drug costs will increase in foreign countries as a result.

# Russian military intelligence official wounded in Moscow

*Associated Press*

MOSCOW — A deputy chief of Russia's military intelligence agency was shot and wounded in Moscow on Friday in an attack that follows a series of assassinations of senior military officers that Russia has blamed on Ukraine.

Lt. Gen. Vladimir Alekseyev was hospitalized after being shot several times by an unidentified assailant at an apartment building in northwestern Moscow, Investigative Committee spokesperson Svetlana Petrenko said in a statement.

She didn't say who could be behind the attack on the 64-year-old who has served as the first deputy head of Russia's military intelligence agency, known as the GRU, since 2011.

He was decorated with the Hero of Russia medal for his role in Moscow's military campaign in Syria.

The shooting came a day after Russian, Ukrainian and U.S. negotiators wrapped up two days of talks in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, aimed at ending the nearly 4-year-old conflict in Ukraine. The Russian delegation was led by Alekseyev's boss, military intelligence chief Adm. Igor Kostyukov.

President Vladimir Putin was informed about the attack, said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who added that law enforcement agencies need to step up protection of senior military officers during the conflict in Ukraine.

Asked about the shooting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said it would be up to law enforcement agencies to pursue the investigation but described it as an apparent "terrorist act" by Ukraine intended to derail peace talks.

The business daily *Kommerstant* said the attacker, posing as a delivery person, shot the general twice in the stairway of his apartment building, wounding him in the foot and the arm. Alekseyev tried to wrest away the gun and was shot again in the chest before the attacker fled, the report said.

Since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, Russian authorities have blamed Kyiv for several assassinations of military officers and public figures in Russia. Ukraine has claimed responsibility for some of them.

In December, a car bomb killed Lt. Gen. Fani Sarvarov, head of the Operational Training Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces' General Staff.

In April, Lt. Gen. Yaroslav Moskalik, a deputy head of the main operational department in the General Staff, was killed by a bomb placed in his car.

# Division of USAID relaunched as nonprofit

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A division of the U.S. Agency for International Development eliminated by Trump administration cuts last year was reborn Thursday as an independent nonprofit, allowing its international work to continue in a new form.

This reincarnation of USAID's Development Innovation Ventures as the nonprofit DIV Fund is thanks to \$48 million raised from two private donors. It is a rare instance of continuation after the Trump administration froze all foreign funding last year and unleashed Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency to tear down the agency that delivered U.S. foreign aid for 60 years.

Out of that destruction, which cost tens of thousands of jobs and caused people around the world to die, many private efforts were made to preserve decades of data and knowledge housed at USAID, help recipients keep vital programs running and reimagine how international development might work.

But few of those efforts have managed to attract the kind of philanthropic funding that the DIV Fund has. Funders, previous grantees and DIV Fund staff gathered in the glass-walled penthouse of a Washington think tank as the sun set Thursday to mark the new chapter. The mood was resolved and optimistic, having found a way to continue where many efforts in international development have been derailed.

Some of the leaders of the new nonprofit were also involved in directing \$110 million from private philanthropy in the past year to projects that lost funding from USAID.

# Guthrie's family pleads with kidnapper, while sheriff says there's no suspect

*Associated Press*

TUCSON, Ariz. — "Today" show host Savannah Guthrie's brother on Thursday renewed the family's plea for their mother's kidnapper to contact them, hours after an Arizona sheriff said investigators don't have proof Nancy Guthrie is alive but believe "she's still out there."

"Whoever is out there holding our mother, we want to hear from you. We haven't heard anything directly," Camron Guthrie said in a video posted on social media.

"We need you to reach out and we need a way to communicate with you so we can move forward," but first the family needs to know the kidnapper

has their mother, he said, echoing a statement his famous sister read the day before.

Five days into the desperate search for 84-year-old Nancy Guthrie, authorities have not identified any suspects or persons of interest, Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos said.

Authorities think she was taken against her will from her home in Tucson over the weekend. DNA tests showed blood found on Guthrie's front porch was a match to her, the sheriff said.

"Right now, we believe Nancy is still out there. We want her home," Nanos said at a news conference earlier Thursday. He acknowledged, however,

that authorities have no evidence she's OK.

Investigators said they are taking seriously notes seeking ransom that were sent to some media outlets.

It's unclear if all of the notes were identical. Heith Janke, the FBI chief in Phoenix, said details included a demand for money with a Thursday evening deadline and a second deadline for Monday if the first one wasn't met. At least one note mentioned a floodlight at Guthrie's home and an Apple watch, Janke said.

"To anyone who may be involved, do the right thing. This is an 84-year-old grandma," Janke said.

# Vasilevskiy, Lightning roll into break

Goalie stops 33 shots as Tampa beats Florida for 19th win in 21 games before NHL pauses for Olympics

*Associated Press*

TAMPA, Fla. — Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 33 shots to improve to 16-0-1 in his past 17 games, helping the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Florida Panthers 6-1 on Thursday night in the final game for both teams before the Olympic break.

Brandon Hagel, Oliver Bjorkstrand, Jake Guentzel, Erik Cernak, Pontus Holmberg and Zengus Girgensons — who will all participate in the Milan Cortina Games — scored for Tampa Bay. The Lightning are 19-1-1 in their past 21 games.

Lightning forward Nikita Kucherov extended his scoring streak to 10 games, his 13th career scoring streak of at least 10 games — tied for fifth in NHL history.

Mackie Samoskevich scored for the Panthers. Danil Tarasov finished with 20 saves for Florida before leaving due to injury in the third period. Sergei Bobrovsky finished the game for the Panthers, who played without regulars Brad Marchand, Aaron Ekblad, Evan Rodrigues. They all sat out after playing Wednesday against Boston.

**Capitals 4, Predators 2:** Pierre-Luc Dubois scored in his first game since Halloween, and Jakob Chychrun added two goals as host Washington beat Nashville.

Logan Thompson returned in goal from an injury of his own and made several sparkling saves, and the Capitals won for the fourth time in five games entering the break. Tom Wilson, who is on Canada's Olympic roster, also scored for the Caps.

Jonathan Marchessault and Michael McCarron scored for Nashville, which had its five-game points streak snapped.

Dubois had no points in his first six games this season and underwent surgery on injuries to his abdominal and adductor muscles. He hadn't played since Oct. 31.

Wilson opened the scoring for Washington, and then Dubois made it 2-0. The flashiest goal belonged to Chychrun, however. The defenseman left Nashville's Tyson Jost behind with a 360-degree spin, then entered the offensive zone and scored.

**Hurricanes 2, Rangers 0:** Rookie Brandon Bussi made 16 saves for his second shutout, and Andrei Svechnikov gave Carolina an early lead in the first period of a victory at New York.

The Hurricanes extend their points streak to 10 games.

Jordan Staal scored into an empty net with 54 seconds left to seal it for the Hurricanes in the final game for both teams before the Olympic break.

The Eastern Conference-leading Hurricanes are 8-0-2 since Jan. 16.

Jonathan Quick made a season-high 41 saves for the Rangers, who were shut out for the ninth time this season and the seventh at home. New York has lost four in a row.

**Penguins 5, Sabres 2:** Avery Hayes scored twice in his NHL debut, Arturs Silovs made 26 saves and Pittsburgh won at Buffalo.

Called up from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League with the Penguins hit by a series of injuries, Hayes tied at 1 at 9:18 of the period on his first shot on goal. He raced to beat defenseman Jacob Bryson to the puck and put a wrister past goalie Alex Lyon.

Hayes made it 2-1 with 1:13 left in the period, taking Anthony Mantha's short, backward pass and knocking it in. He's the third Penguins player to score twice in his NHL debut, joining Rob Brown (two goals on Oct. 21, 1987) and Jake Guentzel (two goals on Nov. 21, 2016).

Hayes has 13 goals and 10 assists in 31 games this season in the AHL. He made his NHL debut with Blake Lizotte out for the birth of his first child, Rickard Rakell nursing a lower-body injury and Noel Acciari sidelined by an illness.

**Islanders 3, Devils 1:** Bo Horvat broke a tie late in the third period and New York went into the Olympic break with a victory at New Jersey.

Horvat went to his backhand off the draw, slipping the puck past goalie Jake Allen, with only 3:27 left to play. Casey Cizikas

scored in the second period for the Islanders and Mathew Barzal scored an empty-net goal to seal the win for New York.

Cizikas put the Islanders up 1-0 at 6:30 in the second period, cleaning up a rebound in front of the net. From behind the net, Allen sent the puck around the boards right to Marc Gatcomb while the Devils were in a line change. Gatcomb fired the puck to the slot, where Kyle MacLean got a stick on it, tipping it to Cizikas. Allen made the save on the first tip by Cizikas, but couldn't control the rebound.

**Senators 2, Flyers 1 (OT):** Tim Stutzle charged past Philadelphia defenseman Travis Sanheim and scored on a backhand shot 47 seconds into overtime, giving visiting Ottawa the victory.

It was Stutzle's 28th goal of the season. The Senators won their fifth game in six outings heading into the Olympic break.

Flyers defenseman Jamie Drysdale scored on a wrist shot from the left circle with 1:14 remaining in regulation.

That came on only the 14th Philadelphia shot of the game against unexpected Ottawa starting goalie James Reimer.

Reimer, 37, was playing in his seventh game since signing with the Senators last month. Would-be Ottawa starter Linus Ullmark recently returned from a personal leave of absence, but he was a late scratch Thursday, reportedly due to illness.

**Golden Knights 4, Kings 1:** Mark Stone had a goal and two assists and Vegas took control early by scoring four times on its first six shots for a victory over visiting Los Angeles.

Vegas heads into the Olympic break with back-to-back wins after losing seven of eight. The Kings have lost four of five.

Jack Eichel and Pavel Dorofeyev each had a goal and an assist for the Golden Knights.

Vegas goaltender Adin Hill made 32 saves for his 100th career victory, his most stops since having 34 on March 15, 2025, against Buffalo.

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# Hornets extend winning streak to 8

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Rookie Kon Knueppel had 24 points and LaMelo Ball added 20 to help the Charlotte Hornets roll to a 109-99 victory over the Houston Rockets on Thursday night and extend their winning streak to eight games.

Charlotte's streak is the franchise's longest since winning nine in a row in the 1998-99 season.

The Hornets led by 16 after three quarters and Brandon Miller scored the first five points of the fourth to extend the lead to 96-75 with about 11 minutes to go. A 5-0 run by Charlotte, with a 3-pointer by Sion James, made it 103-81 with about eight minutes remaining and Houston coach Ime Udoka pulled his starters.

It was the second straight lopsided defeat for the Rockets, who lost 114-93 Wednesday night to a Boston team playing without star Jaylen Brown.

Kevin Durant led Houston, which entered Thursday in fourth place in the Western Conference, with 31 points and Jabari Smith Jr. added 17. It was a tough night for Alperen Sengun, who was averaging 21.2 points, and scored just seven on 3-of-11 shooting.

Miles Bridges added 18 points for the Hornets and Miller finished with 11 after sitting out the entire second quarter after getting three fouls in the first.

**Wizards 126, Pistons 117:** Will Riley scored 20 points, Sharife Cooper added 18 and visiting Washington upset Eastern Conference-leading Detroit.

The Wizards only dressed 10 players — Cooper was one of three on two-way contracts — a day after a trade with the Dallas Mavericks, but beat a Pistons team that had won five of six. The Wizards improved to 14-36, while Pistons fell to 37-13.

Justin Champagnie and Tristan Vukcevic each scored 14 points for Washington, which has won four of six since a nine-game losing streak. The Wizards got 69 points from their reserves.

Cade Cunningham had 30 points, eight rebounds and eight assists for the Pistons, who went 9 for 33 (27.3%) on 3-pointers. All-Star center Jalen Duren had four points and three rebounds in 13 minutes left before leaving game with knee soreness.

**Raptors 123, Bulls 107:** Brandon Ingram scored 33 points, Immanuel Quickley had 24 and host Toronto beat new-look Chicago.

Collin Murray-Boyles and Sandro Mamu-

kelashvili each scored 17 points and Scottie Barnes added 13 as Toronto snapped a four-game losing streak against Chicago.

Toronto has 31 wins in its first 53 games, eclipsing last season's win total.

Anfernee Simons scored 22 points in his first game with Chicago and Matas Buzelis had 18. Guerschon Yabusele marked his Bulls' debut with 15 points and 11 rebounds.

Jaden Ivey and Jalen Smith each scored 13 points and Isaac Okoro added 10 for the Bulls, who overhauled their roster by making seven trades ahead of Thursday afternoon's deadline.

**Magic 118, Nets 98:** Jalen Suggs had 15 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his first career triple-double, Desmond Bane scored 23 points and Paolo Banchero added 22 to lead Orlando past visiting Brooklyn.

Playing 29 minutes in his seventh game after missing eight games with a right knee injury, Suggs also blocked four shots and had three steals.

Egor Demin led the Nets with a career-high 26 points, shooting 6 of 10 from 3-point range. Fellow rookie Nolan Traore matched his career high with 21 points and added seven assists.

Michael Porter Jr., Brooklyn's leading scorer, shot 2 of 13 and scored nine points.

The loss was the 15th in 17 games for the Nets, who came in as the lowest-scoring (107.1) and poorest field-goal shooting (44.3%) team in the NBA. They shot 41.5% and had 19 turnovers.

**Hawks 121, Jazz 119:** Nickeil Alexander-Walker broke a tie on a short jumper with 1.3 seconds left and had 23 points in Atlanta's victory over visiting Utah.

Newly acquired Jock Landale had a season-high 29 points and hit a go-ahead 3-pointer with 45 seconds. He had a career-high five 3-pointers and set season highs in blocks with four and assists with five.

Jalen Johnson had his third straight triple-double, giving him 10 on the season. He finished with 22 points, 16 rebounds and 15 assists.

The Hawks traded for Landale on Wednesday, shortly after he was a part of an eight-player deal that sent him to Utah from Memphis. The Jazz sent the veteran big man to Atlanta for cash considerations. He started in place of the injured Onyeka Okongwu, who missed his fourth game due to a dental fracture.

Jazz rookie Ace Bailey tied it at 119 with a 3-pointer with nine seconds left, setting up Alexander-Walker's winner.

**Spurs 135, Mavericks 123:** Victor Wembanyama had 29 points and 11 rebounds, and San Antonio overcame rookie No. 1 pick Cooper Flagg's fourth consecutive 30-point game in a victory at Dallas.

Flagg scored 32 points to extend his NBA record for consecutive games with at least 30 points by a teenager. The 19-year-old joined Michael Jordan, Bernard King, Allen Iverson and Jalen Green as the only rookies to score at least 30 in four straight games since the NBA-ABA merger in 1976-77.

Dallas lost all four games and is on a six-game losing streak, its longest of the season.

Harrison Barnes was another of seven San Antonio players in double figures with 19 points, and De'Aaron Fox scored 17 points while pushing through a rough shooting night with two clutch 3-pointers in the fourth quarter. The second came on Wembanyama's sixth assist and gave the Spurs a 131-123 lead with 1:24 remaining.

**Lakers 119, 76ers 115:** Austin Reaves scored 35 points in just 25 minutes, and Los Angeles overcame Luka Doncic's departure with a left leg injury for a victory over visiting Philadelphia.

LeBron James had 17 points and 10 assists for the Lakers, who snapped Philadelphia's five-game winning streak with a big second-half rally in their first game back from a draining eight-game road trip.

Joel Embiid had 35 points and Tyrese Maxey added 26 points and 13 assists for the 76ers, who blew a 14-point lead and nearly came back from a 16-point deficit in the second half of their first loss since Jan. 26.

**Warriors 101, Suns 97:** Pat Spencer scored a career-high 20 points, Gui Santos added 18 and shorthanded Golden State erased a 14-point deficit in the fourth quarter to win at Phoenix.

The Suns had a chance to pull ahead in the final seconds, but Dillon Brooks missed a 3-pointer and Golden State's Gary Payton II came up with the rebound before Moses Moody fed De'Anthony Melton for a layup as time expired.

Phoenix led 90-76 less than two minutes into the fourth after Collin Gillespie hit 3s on back-to-back offensive possessions.

But the Warriors weren't done, methodically cutting into the advantage before Melton made a layup to tie the game at 97-all with 55.8 seconds remaining. Santos made a fast-break layup with 28.7 seconds remaining to put Golden State up 99-97.

Brooks led the Suns with 24 points. Grayson Allen had 21.

# No. 2 Michigan reaches school-best 21-1

*Associated Press*

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Nimari Burnett scored a career-high 31 points, leading No. 2 Michigan to a 110-69 victory over Penn State on Thursday night.

The Wolverines have won seven straight to set a school record with a 21-1 overall record. They are 11-1 in the Big Ten, tied atop the conference with No. 5 Illinois.

The Nittany Lions (10-13, 1-11) have lost nine of their past 10

games, falling to 18th and last place in the Big Ten.

Penn State's Freddie Dilione V scored 19 points, while Josh Reed and Melih Tunca had 15 points each.

Michigan's Morez Johnson had 12 points and eight rebounds, Trey McKenney and L.J. Cason scored 12 apiece and Aday Mara had 11 points and a career-high six blocks.

Penn State scored on its first possession, then gave up 15

straight points and its short-handed squad couldn't come back.

The Nittany Lions were coming off their first Big Ten victory against Minnesota despite finishing the game without four players.

They were not able to pull off the feat again without Tibor Mirtic, Sasa Ciani, Ivan Juric and Eli Rice available against one of the best teams in college basketball.

The Wolverines led 56-24 at halftime after shooting 66% from the field and making 7 of 13 3-pointers. Against an undersized opponent, they scored half their points in the paint and had 15 second-chance points.

Michigan finished with 100-plus points for the eighth time this season and won by 40-plus for the eighth time, maintaining momentum after beating then-No. 7 Michigan State and then-No. 5 Nebraska last week.

# Antetokounmpo remains with Bucks at deadline

*Associated Press*

Giannis Antetokounmpo remained with the Milwaukee Bucks while plenty of other players changed addresses as the NBA trade deadline passed Thursday.

An extremely busy deadline, at that: There were 28 trades made in the week leading up to the deadline, the most that the NBA has seen over that timeframe in the past 20 years — with 18 of those trades getting finalized by teams Thursday in the hours before the deadline.

That ties a deadline-day record, set two years ago. And 27 teams were involved in at least one trade in the week leading up to the deadline, tying another league record.

None of them involved Antetokounmpo, who had been the center of attention heading into the trade deadline amid reports that the Milwaukee Bucks started listening to offers for the two-time MVP and nine-time all-NBA selection.

Antetokounmpo, who hasn't played since straining his right calf on Jan. 23, has spent his entire 13-year career with Milwaukee and led the Bucks to a title in 2021.

There were some notable trades to take place Thursday, but none of them involved anyone with Antetokounmpo's star power.

Indiana acquired 7-footer Ivica Zubac from the Los Angeles Clippers. Minnesota added potential bench scoring by getting Ayo Dosunmu from the Chicago Bulls. New York gained backcourt depth by landing Jose Alvarado from New Orleans.

Most of the biggest names to change teams did so in trades that were reported earlier in the week. That list of players included 2018 MVP and 11-time All-Star James Harden as well as five-time all-NBA selection Anthony Davis.

The Clippers sent Harden to the Cleveland Cavaliers for two-time All-Star Darius Garland and a second-round draft pick. Garland, 26, is 10 years younger than Harden.

Davis is going from the Dallas Mavericks to the Washington Wizards as part of an eight-player trade.

The Wizards are receiving Davis, Jaden Hardy, D'Angelo Russell and Dante Exum in exchange for Khris Middleton, AJ Johnson, Malaki Branham, Marvin Bagley III, two first-round picks and three second-round selections.

The Wizards eventually can pair Davis with four-time All-Star guard Trae Young, who came to Washington last month in a trade with Atlanta. Davis and Young are both currently injured.

Dallas then sent Branham to Charlotte in exchange for point guard Tyus Jones. Charlotte had acquired Jones from Orlando earlier in the week.

## Pacers acquire Zubac

The Indiana Pacers paid a big price to get a big man. The Pacers acquired Zubac and Kobe Brown from the Clippers in exchange for Benedict Mathurin, Isaiah Jackson, a conditional 2026 first-round pick, a 2028 second-round pick and a 2029 first-round pick.

Zubac, who turns 29 next month, has averaged 14.4 points and 11 rebounds this season. The 7-footer gives Indiana a reliable center that could help the defending Eastern Conference champions contend again when Tyrese Haliburton returns from his Achilles injury next season.

## Wolves get Dosunmu

The Timberwolves acquired Dosunmu and forward Julian Phillips from Chicago in exchange for guard Rob Dillingham, forward Leonard Miller and four second-round draft picks.

Dosunmu is making about \$7.5 million in the final season of his current contract. The 26-year-old is averaging a career-high 15 points per game and shooting a career-best 45.1% from 3-point range. He will fill

an obvious need for the Timberwolves for more offense off the bench.

The Bulls also were involved in a three-team trade with the Bucks and Phoenix Suns. The Bulls acquired Nick Richards from Phoenix. The Bucks got Ousmane Dieng from Chicago and Nigel Hayes-Davis from Phoenix, though they later waived Hayes-Davis. The Suns acquired Cole Anthony and Amir Coffey from Milwaukee.

## Cavs trade Ball to Jazz

The Cleveland Cavaliers sent guard Lonzo Ball to the Utah Jazz for two second-round draft picks.

Ball appeared in 35 games, including three starts, and averaged 4.6 points, 3.9 assists and 1.3 steals in 20.8 minutes. The Jazz will be the fifth team for Ball in his seven-year career.

## Knicks get Alvarado

The Knicks and Pelicans made a last-hour deal Thursday to send Jose Alvarado to New York for two second-round picks and Dalen Terry, whom they acquired in a separate deal with Chicago, a person with knowledge of the deal told the AP.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the trade hadn't been announced publicly.

# Stafford edges Maye for AP NFL MVP

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Matthew Stafford walked away with the AP NFL Most Valuable Player award and a declaration that he's returning to the Los Angeles Rams for another season.

Stafford edged Drake Maye for the MVP on Thursday night in the closest race since Peyton Manning and Steve McNair were co-winners in 2003.

Stafford received 24 of 50 first-place votes while Maye got 23. But Maye has a chance to go home this week with a Vince Lombardi Trophy. He leads the New England Patriots against the Seattle Seahawks in the Super Bowl on Sunday.

Stafford, who turns 38 on Saturday, wants another opportunity to try to win his second Super Bowl ring with the Rams.

"Oh yeah, I'll be back. It was such an amazing season and I play with such a great group of guys and great group of coaches that I was lucky enough to finish this season healthy, and I wanna make sure that I go out there and see what happens next year," Stafford told the AP.

Stafford brought his four daughters — all dressed in identical black-and-white dresses — to the stage to accept the award.

He thanked his team and saved his wife and daughters for last: "You're unbelievable cheerleaders for me. I appreciate it. I am so happy to have you at the games on the sideline with me, and I can't wait for you to cheer me on next year when we're out there kicking (butt)."

It was Stafford's way of announcing he will be back next season after contemplating retirement.

In other awards:

■ Myles Garrett was a unanimous choice for the AP NFL Defensive Player of the Year award after setting a season record for sacks with 23.

■ All-Pro wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba beat out Chris-

## Brees, Fitzgerald headline Hall of Fame class missing coach of Patriots dynasty

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Drew Brees and Larry Fitzgerald headlined the 2026 Pro Football Hall of Fame class featuring five players but not six-time Super Bowl winning head coach Bill Belichick.

Brees and Fitzgerald both made it in their first year of eligibility in results announced at NFL Honors on Thursday night after prolific careers. Luke Kuechly and Adam Vinatieri made it in their second seasons of eligibility, while Roger Craig was the lone pick among seniors, coaches and contributors.

"One of the coolest moments was getting up on that stage with all the other Hall of Famers," Fitzgerald said. "That moment kind of crystallized it for me."

But the class is also noteworthy for Belichick's absence as at least 11 of the 50 voters opted against giving him a vote despite a career with 333 wins in the regular season and playoffs and the most Super Bowl titles of any head coach. A report last week that Belichick fell short in his first year of eligibility was met with widespread criticism of both the voters and the process for choosing Hall of Famers.

"His stats speak for themselves," said Vinatieri, who played six years for Belichick.

"I thought he'd have a real good chance to be up there as well. The people who voted made their votes and I think he'll be up here one day."

The man who hired Belichick in New England to set the stage for the Patriots dynasty also fell short, with owner Robert Kraft failing to get enough votes.

This is the second straight year with a smaller class after only four people made it last year as new rule changes have made it harder to get into the Hall. There had been at least seven people inducted in the previous 12 classes before last year.

That contributed to the snub for Belichick and Kraft, who were grouped with Craig and two other players — Ken Anderson and L.C. Greenwood — who have been retired for at least 25 seasons. The voters picked three of the five candidates with the highest vote-getter and anyone else above 80% getting the honor.

Craig, who was in his 28th year of eligibility, was the only one of those five to make it. He was the first player to have 1,000 yards rushing and 1,000 yards receiving in the same season, which happened in 1985, and he led the NFL with 2,036 yards from scrimmage in 1988 when he helped San Francisco win the Super Bowl.

tian McCaffrey for the AP NFL Offensive Player of the Year award.

■ New England's Mike Vrabel beat out Jacksonville's Liam Coen for the AP NFL Coach of the Year award, becoming the seventh coach to win it with two different teams.

■ McCaffrey became the first running back to win the AP NFL Comeback Player of the Year award in 24 years.

■ Browns linebacker Carson Schweginger was a runaway winner for the AP NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year award.

■ Panthers wide receiver Tetairoa McMillan ran away with the AP NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year award.

■ Patriots offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels won the

AP NFL Assistant Coach of the Year award in the first season of his third stint with the team.

A nationwide panel of 50 media members who regularly cover the league completed voting before the playoffs began. Votes were tabulated by the accounting firm Lutz and Carr.

Voters selected a top 5 for the eight AP NFL awards. First-place votes were worth 10 points. Second- through fifth-place votes were worth 5, 3, 2 and 1 points, respectively.

Josh Allen, the 2024 NFL MVP, received two first-place MVP votes, and Justin Herbert got the other one.

Stafford, who earned first-team All-Pro honors for the first time in his 17-year career, finished with 366 points to Maye's

361. Allen placed third with 91 points, Christian McCaffrey (71) was fourth and Trevor Lawrence (49) came in fifth.

It's McCaffrey's second top-five finish in three years, more than any other non-quarterback since the weighted point system was implemented in 2022.

Stafford led the NFL with 4,707 yards passing and 46 TDs. He threw eight interceptions and finished second to Maye with a 109.2 passer rating. Stafford and the Los Angeles Rams lost to Seattle in the NFC championship game.

Maye had 4,394 yards passing, 31 TDs and eight interceptions. The second-year pro led the league in passer rating (113.5) and completion percentage (72).